

KDHE Emergency Operations Center Opens in June

*By Mike Cameron
Staff Writer*

KDHE will soon have a new tool in its arsenal to respond to a terrorist attack or a widespread infectious disease outbreak. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC), on the third floor of the Curtis State Office Building, is near completion and should be available for use in early June.

The KDHE Emergency Operations Center will serve as a resource for the entire agency, and will be used during health and environmental drills, exercises, and in response to real events. The state-of-the-art operations center will be used to manage KDHE's response to a terrorist attack with a biological or chemical weapon or other widespread public health crisis, such as an accidental release of a hazardous material or a pandemic flu outbreak.

"The EOC will enhance our ability to respond to a public health crisis by allowing us to monitor the situation and to communicate with other agencies responding to the crisis," said Sandy Johnson, bioterrorism operations director.

The room has eight workstations, which include the latest model Dell laptop computer in a docking station, telephone console with headset and wireless headphones for monitoring news broadcasts on the radio, local or national television, without distracting others in the room.

The workstations are labeled for use by the following response personnel: Finance /Administration, Information Systems, Laboratory, Logistics, Medical Director, Operations, Planning, and Hospital Liaison.

News broadcasts can be viewed on one of four plasma screen TV monitors and can be broadcast by LCD projector on one of the two large screens at each end of the room. Broadcast signals from local television, cable and a satellite downlink are available for viewing on one of the four monitors. VCRs are available for taping broadcasts. All of these functions are controlled by a central wireless remote control center.

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Scott Koertner, Strategic National Stockpile coordinator, conducts a workstation test inside the new Emergency Operations Center at KDHE last week. The new EOC is scheduled to begin operations in June.

All cables and connectors were run under the floor to prevent clutter, and all equipment is stored in a six-foot tall, security cabinet. A large table in the center of the room is available for additional response personnel as needed. The room also houses a secure laptop cart with the capability to recharge up to 36 laptops at once.

The EOC also has video-conferencing capabilities, with a camera at each end and a Smart Board - electronic "white board" that is connected to a computer to enable screen capture.

"The KDHE EOC will become fully functional in the very near future," said Mindee Reece, bioterrorism program director. "The room is the culmination of a lot of planning and hard work, and we look forward to testing its capabilities during a drill to iron out all of the kinks."

An open house and tour of the EOC is being planned as soon as it is completed later this month.